

Currie Inquiry Puts Pentagon Research Job Under Cloud

Malcolm R. Currie, the Pentagon's chief of research and development, is being promoted to the additional job of overseeing all Department of Defense (DOD) weapons procurement—despite the fact that the Senate is investigating charges that Currie urged production of the Condor missile after spending a weekend at a Caribbean resort paid for by Condor's chief contractor, Rockwell International Corporation.

The promotion, which comes at a time when his actions are being questioned, is interpreted by some Pentagon watchers on Capitol Hill as an effort by his superiors to dramatize their confidence in him. As Director of Defense Research and Engineering (DDR & E), Currie manages \$10.9 billion in research and development funds, the largest R & D budget of any federal agency. He is, therefore, probably the single most influential research administrator in the nation.

Last March, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld fined Currie \$3200, which was 1 month's pay, and severely reprimanded him following disclosures that Currie and his daughter had spent the weekend of Labor Day, 1975, at a Bimini, Bahamas, resort owned by Rockwell. The trip was in violation of Pentagon rules prohibiting officials from accepting entertainment from contractors. Currie has since admitted that he made a mistake in judgment. The indiscretion, along with the subsequent public rebuke, is the first scandal to touch the office of the DDR & E since it was created in 1958. Currie, who took the job in 1973, is the first DDR & E to have been recruited from private industry.

However, the question of Currie's conduct did not end there. On 5 April, the *New York Times* in an exclusive story quoted staffers in the Pentagon as saying that the day after his return from Bimini, Currie argued vigorously to his staff that Condor production go ahead, despite the fact that Navy reports of the missile's poor test performance urged against production.

According to the *Times* story, Currie's opinion was key in persuading the Defense Systems Acquisition Review Council (DSARC), a high-level, four-member committee, which votes on all weapons systems procurement, to approve Condor production. Currie had one of four votes on the DSARC, which was due to decide about Condor in a 30 September meeting. The *Times* said that only one DSARC member, Leonard Sullivan, Jr.—at the time Assistant Secretary of Defense for program analysis and evaluation—was openly for killing the program. Terence E. McClary, comptroller of the DOD, was described by the *Times* as the one DSARC member “wavering” about whether to approve production. The *Times* alleged that Currie, in an unusual move, wrote a strong memorandum only to



McClary, urging a Condor go-ahead; McClary “accepted” the memo without consulting his own staff (who were urging against production); the memo was subsequently adopted as the DSARC position.

Subsequently, in mid-October, DSARC decided to recommend limited production of Condor pending the results of further tests, and on 4 November, Deputy Secretary of Defense William Clements concurred. The *Times* alleged, however, that the Clements decision against full production was linked to the leak of Condor test data to the General Accounting Office and GAO's having expressed “concern” about going ahead with Condor production at this stage.

The *Times* also quoted an unnamed industry executive as saying that Currie had also been “making the rounds” of Pentagon contractors, dropping hints that he would like a job with one of them whenever he leaves the Pentagon. Currie worked with Hughes Aircraft Co. and then Beckman Instruments, before he became the DDR & E.

In the wake of the *Times* story, Senator Thomas F. Eagleton (D-Mo.) who had been investigating the Condor program anyway, called for Currie's suspension from his job until the charges were resolved one way or another. Senator William Proxmire (D-Wisc.), who heads a subcommittee on defense production, at Eagleton's request promised an “impartial” investigation of the charges, which is still under way.

Currie, meanwhile, told the press that in fact he had “slowed the program considerably” at the 30 September DSARC meeting. And apparently his boss, Rumsfeld, believed him, for, on 7 June, Rumsfeld told Eagleton that an in-house “investigation” of the matter had concluded that “Currie was the architect of the plan accepted by Mr. Clements not to approve production of CONDOR.” Eagleton immediately shot back that the investigation by DOD was “whitewash.”

As to Currie's hints about prospective employment, Rumsfeld replied that although Currie had been approached by defense contractors, “in each case” he had indicated a desire to go back to commercial business, rather than the defense industry.

In the meantime, Clements, responding to a directive of the Office of Management and Budget, has decided that Currie be made “acquisition executive” for the department. He has also directed that Currie be the only chairman of the DSARC. Previously DSARC's production reviews were managed by another official. Clement's directive to Currie, however has not yet been implemented.

At issue in the Currie stir is whether his attitude toward the Condor became more favorable after his Bimini vacation and whether Currie was the architect of a production slowdown or of a production speedup. Eagleton has also raised questions about the managerial wisdom placing one official in charge of both research and procurement—a course that runs counter to long-standing Pentagon administrative practice. Finally, Eagleton would like to see public officials in the new, post-Watergate era avoid even the slightest taint of suspicion by suspending their duties when their integrity in office is seriously questioned.

—DEBORAH SHAPLEY